**Persuasion Mindset: The Effect of Persuasion on the Persuader**

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Consumer-to-consumer information sharing online is increasingly common in today's marketplace. The vast amount of content on review websites (e.g., Yelp, Rotten Tomatoes) suggests that much of what consumers convey about products and experiences is intended to persuade others. While considerable research has examined how consumers are affected by their desire to resist persuasion attempts, surprisingly little is known about processes in which consumers actively attempt to persuade others. Specifically, might consumers form different evaluations of a target product or experience when their goal is persuade others (vs. when their goal is to inform)?

Prior research has shown that communicating with others, or even anticipating the need to publicize one's thoughts, can affect what consumers choose and how they evaluate products (e.g., Lamberton, Naylor, & Haws, 2013; Moore 2012; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000; Schlosser & Shavitt, 2002). One common explanation for this effect is that consumers rationalize their choices by focusing on attributes that seem justifiable to others (as opposed to those they personally value). In essence, prior research suggests that expecting to talk about consumption affects evaluations through a process of pre-emptive conformity.

We extend this prior research to propose that persuasion (as a specific type of communication) affects evaluations through a different process. We draw on the Persuasion Knowledge Model and related work (PKM—Friestad & Wright, 1994; Campbell & Kirmani, 2000) to argue that consumers have a sense (i.e., implicit theory) that confidence is needed to persuade others, particularly when the task is perceived to be difficult. Further, we suggest that consumers know that the extremity of an evaluation can serve as an indication of confidence.

Thus, to the extent that consumers feel a greater (implicit) need to signal confidence, we predict that they will strategically make their evaluation of the chosen product more extreme. We propose that this process occurs when consumers enter a mental state that we term the "persuasion mindset" (PM), and we hypothesize that being in this mindset can increase consumers' own susceptibility to influence.

## STUDY 1A

The purpose of study 1a is to test the hypothesis that consumers whose communication goal is to persuade evaluate a target product more positively than those with a goal to inform. The study had a 2 (communication goal: persuade vs. inform) between-subjects design.

### Participants and Procedure

Ninety-eight adults (49% Female; $M_{age}$ = 34.52, SD = 10.64, 19-65) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk completed the study in exchange for a small cash payment. All participants were told that they would "listen to and rate a number of randomly chosen songs from different genres," and that, afterward, they would be asked to write a review of their favorite track. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two communication goal conditions for the review they would be asked to write: persuade or inform. In the persuade condition, participants were told that the goal for writing their review was to "persuade someone shopping for music online to like the song you choose," whereas respondents in the inform condition were told that goal for their review was to "describe the song you choose to someone shopping for music online." Note that these two communication goals were provided *prior* to encountering the stimuli.

Everyone was then directed to the music tracks. Each track (presented in the same order across conditions) was available for listening for exactly one minute, as the after which time the page automatically advanced. Immediately after listening to a track, all participants were asked to provide a rating of the track on a ten-point scale (1 = "very bad," 10 = "very good"). After ratings had been provided for all ten tracks (Appendix A), participants were asked to write a review of their favorite song. Finally, to assess whether or not the communication goal affected involvement in the rating task, all participants were asked to indicate how involved they were in rating each of the music clips on a nine-point scale (1 = "not at all involved," 9 = "very involved").

Results and Discussion.

*Track Ratings.* The maximum and minimum track ratings (across all ten clips) for each respondent were identified. A 2 (communication goal: persuade vs. inform) ANOVA with the maximum rating as the dependent variable revealed that participants in the persuade condition provided a higher maximum rating than did those in the inform condition (8.59 vs. 7.63; $F(1, 96) = 10.28$, $p < .01$). The same ANOVA with the minimum rating as the dependent variable revealed no differences between conditions ($F(1, 96) = .02$, NS).

To rule out the possibility that participants were simply more involved in rating the songs, an ANOVA with self-reported involvement as the dependent variable was conducted. There were neither differences between conditions in terms of involvement ($M_{\text{Persuade}} = 8.23$, $M_{\text{Inform}} = 7.98$; $F(1, 96) = 0.82$, NS).

The results of Study 1a provide evidence that people with a persuasive (vs. informative) communication goal provide more extreme ratings only in the direction of their task (i.e., at the higher end of the scale and not at the lower end).

## STUDY 1B

Study 1b tests the hypothesis that attempting to persuade a dissimilar (vs. similar) other produces more-positive evaluations of a target object. We predict that this occurs because one is less certain about a dissimilar other's preferences and, to compensate for this more difficult task, individuals in a persuasion mindset polarize their own evaluation.

*Pretest*. To ensure that attempting to persuade a dissimilar other was perceived as more difficult than attempting to persuade a similar other, we conducted a pretest with a different sample from the same population that completed the primary study (n = 75). Participants rated whether it is easier to persuade another person who is "very similar to me" versus "dissimilar to me," and someone "with the same tastes as me" versus "different tastes as me" on two separate nine-point scales. As expected, participants reported that it is significantly easier to persuade someone similar ($M$ = 2.49) and who has the same tastes ($M$ = 2.25), as both ratings were significantly different from the midpoint of the nine-point scale (similarity: $t(74) = -12.57$, $p < .0001$; tastes: $t(74) = -16.59$, $p < .0001$).

### Participants and Procedure

One hundred seventy-five undergraduate students were randomly assigned to a 2 (persuasion target: similar vs. dissimilar) between-subjects design and completed the study on

computers in a behavioral lab. Participants in both conditions read that their goal in writing a review was "to persuade this person to like your chosen song" and they read that their review would be read by another study member (i.e., their persuasion "target"), who would be randomly chosen from the laboratory subject pool or from an online survey panel. Individuals in the similar persuasion target condition were "paired" with a target who (ostensibly) matched them on three demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age range, and occupation), while those in the dissimilar condition were paired with a target who did not match them on these demographic characteristics (i.e., the target was the opposite gender, approximately 20 years older, and not a full-time student; see Naylor, Lamberton, and Norton 2011 for details on this approach to manipulating target similarity). The rest of the procedure was identical to study 1a.

Finally, as a manipulation check for target similarity, participants were also asked to indicate their agreement with the following statement on a nine-point scale anchored by "Strongly Disagree" and "Strongly Agree": "My partner in the survey was similar to me."

## Results and Discussion

*Manipulation Check*. As expected, participants rated their partner as significantly more similar in the similar persuasion target condition ($M_{Similar}$ = 4.99) than in the dissimilar target condition ($M_{Dissimilar}$ = 3.22; $F(1, 173) = 18.38$, $p < .0001$).

*Track Ratings.* A 2 (persuasion target: similar vs. dissimilar) between-subjects ANOVA revealed that the highest rating provided by participants was significantly higher in the dissimilar (vs. similar) target condition ($M_{Dissimilar}$ = 8.41, $M_{Similar}$ = 7.93; $F(1, 173) = 6.20$, $p < .05$). A

separate ANOVA with the minimum rating as the dependent variable revealed no differences between conditions ($M_{Dissimilar}$ = 2.15, $M_{Similar}$ = 2.13; $F$(1, 173) = .01, NS).

To ensure that group differences were not driven by involvement, we conducted the same ANOVA with self-reported involvement as the dependent variable. There were no differences between groups in terms of which song was selected as their favorite ($M_{Dissimilar}$ = 6.55, $M_{Similar}$ = 6.31; $F$(1, 173) = .60, NS).

Study 1b provides evidence that individuals generate more-positive ratings of a target object when persuading a dissimilar other. This supports the existence of a persuasion mindset, a mental state in which consumers strategically inflate evaluations to compensate for increased task difficulty.

## STUDY 2

The purpose of study 2 is to test the hypothesis that people in a PM (vs. inform) will infer missing information about attributes that makes their persuasion task easier. The study introduces a persuasion to dislike condition.

### Participants and Procedure.

Two hundred and forty-five participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in exchange for monetary compensation. All participants were told that they would be shown information about a product and asked to write a review about it. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: persuade, dissuade, and inform. Participants in the persuade condition were told that their goal was to “convince someone shopping for a bicycle to like the

one you review." Those in the dissuade condition were told that their goal was to "convince someone to dislike the one you review." Those in the inform condition were told that their goal was to "describe the bicycle to someone shopping for a bike online." All participants were then shown a photograph of a bicycle named "Brand H" along with information about how its attributes performed (see appendix X for stimuli). Specifically, three attributes were described as "above average" (i.e., suspension, pedaling efficiency, and weight/portability) and three were described as "below average" (i.e., braking power, handling, and seat comfort). This was intended to give people enough information about it to come to different conclusions based on their personal attribute weights.

Next, all participants were told that recipients of their review are likely to be interested in the bike's durability and speed, two qualities that were not included in the bike's description. They were asked to use the information about the aforementioned attributes to estimate how Brand H performs on these attributes (so that they could talk about them in their review) using a nine-point scale (1 = "Extremely low performance," 9 = "Extremely high performance"). Immediately afterward, they were directed to write their review and to complete a manipulation check.

Results and Discussion.

Analyses were conducted with a 3 (review intent: persuade vs. inform vs. dissuade) between-subjects ANOVA. For performance estimates of durability, the omnibus test indicated a significant difference between the groups ($F(2,242) = 30.42$, $p < .0001$), thus post hoc analyses were conducted. There was a significant difference between the dissuade and inform condition ($M_{Dissuade} = 4.63$, $M_{Inform} = 6.00$; ($F(1,242) = 29.89$, $p < .0001$). There was a significant difference

between the dissuade and persuade condition ($M_{Persuade}$ = 6.53; ($F$(1,242) = 56.18, $p$ < .0001). There was a significant difference between the inform and persuade condition ($F$(1,242) = 4.26, $p$ < .05).

For performance estimates of speed, the omnibus test indicated a significant difference between the groups ($F$(2,242) = 36.84, $p$ < .0001), thus post hoc analyses were conducted. There was a significant difference between the dissuade and inform condition ($M_{Dissuade}$ = 5.14, $M_{Inform}$ = 6.67; ($F$(1,242) = 39.12, $p$ < .0001). There was a significant difference between the dissuade and persuade condition ($M_{Persuade}$ = 7.16; ($F$(1,242) = 66.37, $p$ < .0001). There was a significant difference between the inform and persuade condition ($F$(1,242) = 3.77, $p$ = .05).

For overall ratings of the bicycle, the omnibus test indicated a significant difference between the groups ($F$(2,242) = 51.02, $p$ < .0001), thus post hoc analyses were conducted. There was a significant difference between the dissuade and inform condition ($M_{Dissuade}$ = 4.26, $M_{Inform}$ = 5.96; ($F$(1,242) = 55.58, $p$ < .0001). There was a significant difference between the dissuade and persuade condition ($M_{Persuade}$ = 6.47; ($F$(1,242) = 91.05, $p$ < .0001). There was a significant difference between the inform and persuade condition ($F$(1,242) = 4.62, $p$ < .05).

The results of study 2 show that people in a PM are more prone to infer missing attributes in the direction of their task, and that this significantly differs from those in the inform condition.

## STUDY 3A

The purpose of study 3a is to test the hypothesis that consumers with a goal to persuade (inform) are more likely to use benefits (attributes) when writing a product review.

## Participants and Procedure

One hundred eighty one participants (37% Female; $M_{age}$ = 34.07, SD = 11.64, 19-72) recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk. All participants were told that they would be beta-testing a new system for writing reviews. In this system, it was explained that people would be asked to provide a review of a product by 1.) giving an overall star rating (out of 5), 2.) writing a title for the review, and 3.) selecting five statements from a list of statements about the product. Participants were randomly-assigned to one of two conditions: persuade or inform. Those in the persuade condition were told that their goal was to persuade someone to like the product and that they should "choose statements that you think will make someone feel most positively about the product." Participants in the inform condition were told their goal was to describe the product to someone and that they should "choose the statements that you think will make someone feel most informed about the product."

Next, all participants were directed to write their review about a car that was displayed. While looking at this car, they were prompted to provide a rating of the car and a title for their review. Next, they were asked to choose five statements from a list of eighteen statements that would serve as their review. Nine of the statements featured attributes of the car (e.g., "Under $25,000," "45 mpg") and nine of them featured benefits brought about by the associated attribute (e.g., "You'll have money left over," and "Uses less gas"). The order of the statements was recorded. The proportion of benefits selected (out of five) and the position in the rank order served as dependent variables. Participants then completed the other dependent measures and manipulation checks.

Results and Discussion.

Analyses were conducted with a 2 (review intent: persuade vs. inform) between-subjects ANOVA. Participants with a goal to persuade selected more benefits for their review than did participants with a goal to inform ($M_{Persuade} = 2.36$, $M_{Inform} = 1.94$; ($F(1,179) = 6.23$, $p < .05$). Additionally, participants with a goal to persuade selected more benefits in the first two positions of their review than did participants with a goal to inform ($M_{Persuade} = .83$, $M_{Inform} = .62$; ($F(1,179) = 4.16$, $p < .05$). Replicating results from study 1a in a new context, participants with a goal to persuade rated the car higher than did participants with a goal to inform ($M_{Persuade} = 4.49$, $M_{Inform} = 3.60$; ($F(1,173) = 56.08$, $p < .0001$).

Study 2 shows that, consistent with our hypotheses, individuals with a goal to persuade (vs. inform) were more likely to express their reviews in terms of benefits (vs. attributes). Supporting the idea that people with a goal to persuade think about what is most persuasive to others, they were more likely to select attributes in the first two positions of their review and they were more likely to think that other people would like the car.

## STUDY 3B

The purpose of study 3b is to test the existence of a hypothesized interaction between review intent and advertisement framing. Specifically, we predict that individuals in a PM are more persuaded by advertisements featuring benefits vs. attributes, while there should be no difference between attributes and benefits while informing.

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred fifty participants (37% Female; $M_{age}$ = 32.11, SD = 10.33, 18-68) from Amazon Mechanical Turk. All participants were told that they would be given information about a car currently being offered in the marketplace. They were instructed to use this information to create a product review. We manipulated the intent of their review. Participants in the persuasion condition were told that they should write a persuasive review read the following:

> Your goal is to convince someone shopping for a car to like the one you review. That is, you should say whatever you think will make someone feel positively about the car. Try to be as persuasive as you can.

Participants in the informative condition were told that they should write an informative review and they read the following:

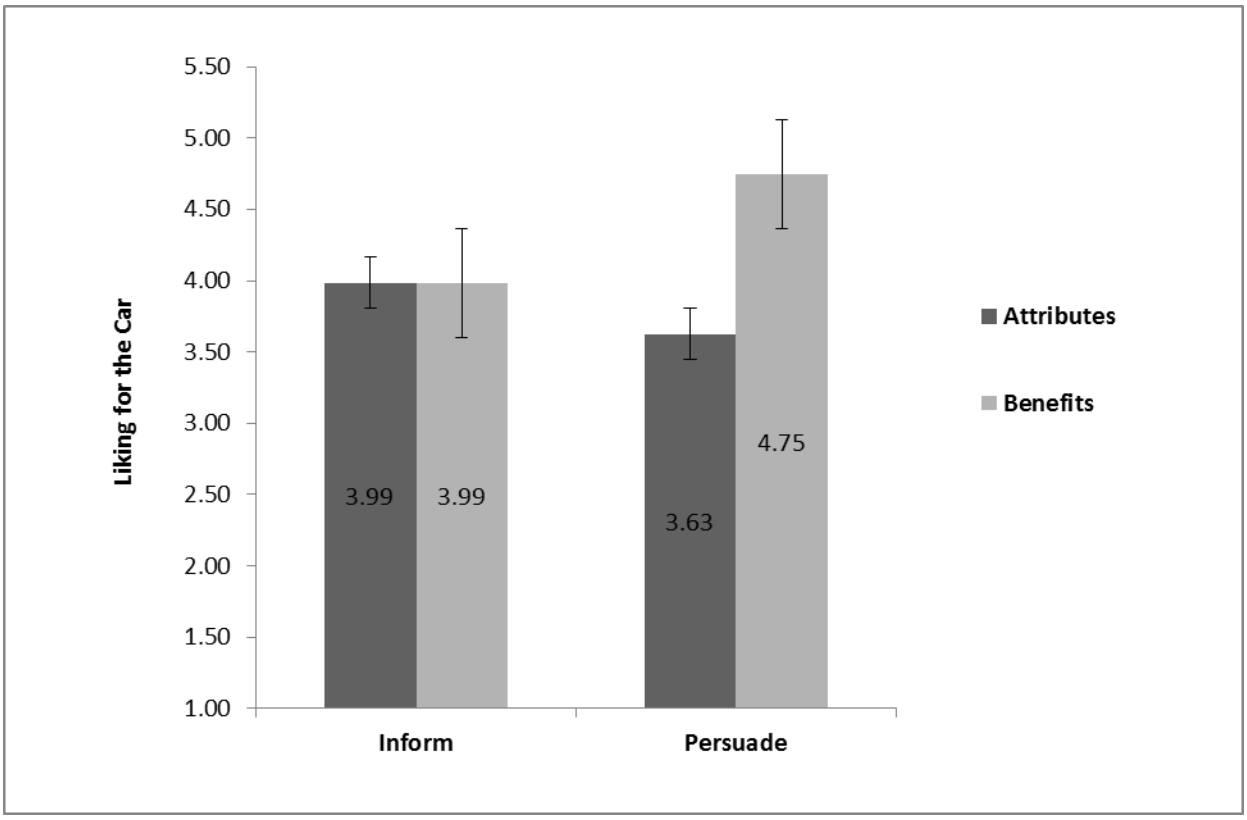
> Your goal is to describe the car to someone shopping for a car online. That is, you should say whatever you think will make someone feel informed about the car. Try to be as informative as you can.

All participants were then told that they would be viewing an advertisement for a car that was not the one they'd be asked to review. They were told that they'd view this ad to so that they could "get a feel for the types of information communicated in car ads so you can be as [informative/persuasive] as possible." Next, they proceeded to view an advertisement for a car that was manipulated to feature an attribute frame or benefits frame; the other content of the ad was identical across conditions. The headline read "Good things come in small packages…"In the attributes frame, this was completed with "Compact. Starting under $20,000." In the benefits frame, this was completed with "Park anywhere. With money leftover." Participants were given as much time as they wanted to view the advertisement. Immediately after, they were directed to the dependent measures. Participants were asked to respond to the following question on a one ("Not at all") to nine ("Very much") scale: "How much do you like the advertised car?" Using

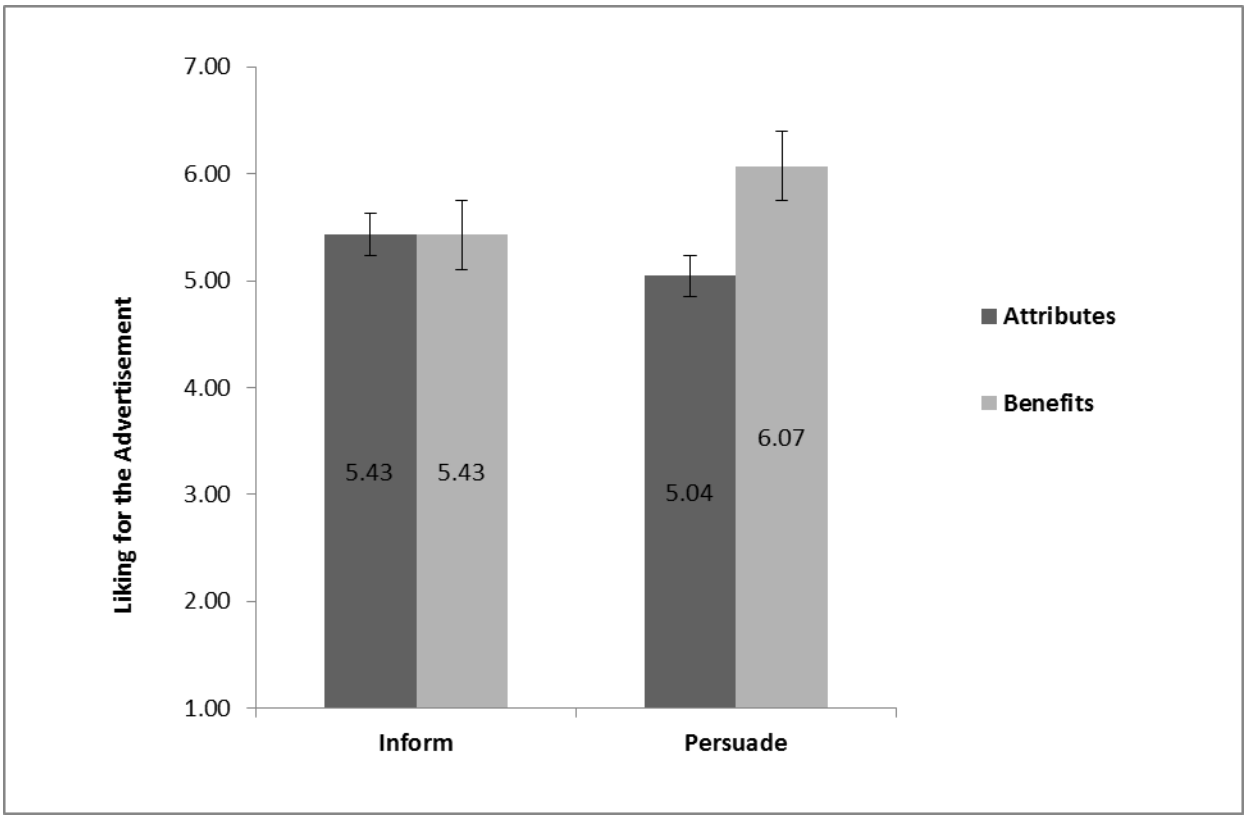
the same scale, participants were asked to respond to the following question: “How much do you like the advertisement?”

Results and Discussion.

Analyses were conducted with a 2 (review intent: persuade vs. inform) x 2 (ad framing: attributes vs. benefits) factorial between-subjects ANOVA. There was a main effect of ad framing such that those in the benefits frame reported liking the car more than those in the attributes frame ($M_{Benefits} = 4.37$, $M_{Attributes} = 3.81$; ($F(1,271) = 3.91$, $p < .05$). There was not a main effect of review intent ($M_{Persuade} = 4.19$, $M_{Inform} = 3.99$; ($F(1,271) = .51$, *NS*). These results were qualified by an interaction ($F(1,271) = 3.91$, $p < .05$). When the review intent was to inform, participants liked the car equally when the advertisement was framed using attributes or benefits ($F(1,135) = 0.00$, *NS*); however, when the intent was to persuade, participants liked the car more when the ad featured a benefits frame ($F(1,136) = 7.62$, $p < .01$).




There was a main effect of ad framing such that those in the benefits frame reported liking the car more than those in the attributes frame ($M_{Benefits} = 5.75$, $M_{Attributes} = 5.24$; ($F(1,271) = 3.97$, $p < .05$). There was not a main effect of review intent ($M_{Persuade} = 5.56$, $M_{Inform} = 5.43$; ($F(1,271) = .25$, *NS*). These results were qualified by an interaction ($F(1,271) = 4.10$, $p < .05$). When the review intent was to inform, participants liked the car equally when the advertisement was framed using attributes or benefits ($F(1,135) = -0.02$, *NS*); however, when the intent was to persuade, participants liked the car more when the ad featured a benefits frame ($F(1,136) = 9.04$, $p < .01$).




The results show that individuals in a persuasion mindset show more favorable responses to products and advertisements featuring benefit-based appeals.

## STUDY 4

The purpose of study 4 is to replicate the results of prior studies using a face-to-face interaction context and to show that the effects of a persuasion mindset extend into carryover after the communication task itself.

### Participants and Procedure.

One hundred and ninety undergraduate students completed the study in a behavioral lab for course credit. The study was run in groups of ten. Upon arriving to the lab, participants were

randomly assigned to go into a breakout room or the computer lab. Those in the breakout rooms were assigned to be a “Source” and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: persuade or inform. Those in the computer lab were assigned to be a “Target” and they completed a separate study to ensure that source participants had enough time to complete their evaluation. Participants in the breakout rooms and in the lab were “paired” with each other. All participants were told that the experimenters were interested in how people communicate information to others. Participants in the source condition read the following:

You have been randomly assigned to be a [Persuader/Informer]. Another person currently in your session has been randomly assigned to be a Target. This person will come to your room in a few minutes and you will interact face-to-face. As a/n [Persuader/Informer], your goal is to [persuade the Target to share your opinion/inform the Target] about a new movie. Next, they were directed to watch a trailer for a soon to be released film. Everyone was given up to three minutes to watch the trailer before the page automatically advanced. Immediately afterward, they were directed to rate the clip on a ten-point scale (1 = “very bad,” 10 = “very good”).

Next, their rating was re-displayed to them. In the persuade condition, participants read the following information:

“Your goal is to influence the target to share your opinion of the product. Based on your own opinion of the film, which of the following are you going to do?”

They then selected from a binary measure “I will persuade the target to [like/dislike] the film.”

In the inform task, participants responded to the following question using a binary measure: “What is your overall opinion of the movie?” “I [like/dislike] the film.” Next, all source participants were instructed to interact with their targets by persuading the person to feel a

particular way about it or informing them about it. Once the interaction was complete, the source was supposed to tell the target to return to the computer lab. The source was then directed to an ostensibly separate study which instructed them to view an advertisement and provide their opinions of it. This was the same advertisement used in study 3b, which was manipulated to be an attributes or benefits frame. They were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statements on a nine-point scale (1 = "Not at all," 9 = "Very much"): "How much do you like the advertised car?"

Upon returning to their seat in the computer lab, those in the target condition were asked to rate the film based on the source's comments using the same ten-point scale. Additionally, they were asked to indicate how they felt about the social interaction with the source on a seven-point scale: (1 = "It was extremely unpleasant," 7 = "It was extremely pleasant").

Results and Discussion.

*Source Measures.* Ratings of the movie were analyzed using a 2 (persuade vs. inform) x 2 (opinion: like vs. dislike) between-subjects ANOVA. There was a main effect of opinion such that those who liked the film ($M$ = 6.71) rated it higher than did those who disliked it ($M$ = 3.59; $F(1, 91) = 128.28$, $p < .0001$). There was not a main effect of communication goal ($M_{Persuade}$ = 5.21, $M_{Inform}$ = 5.09; ($F(1,91) = .19$, NS). More importantly, however, there was an interaction ($F(1,91) = 4.06$, $p < .05$). When participants disliked the film, there was no difference between the persuade and inform conditions in how the film was rated ($M_{Persuade}$ = 3.38, $M_{Inform}$ = 3.81; ($F(1,43) = .84$, NS). However, when participants liked the film, there was a significant difference in how they rated the film ($M_{Persuade}$ = 7.04, $M_{Inform}$ = 6.37; ($F(1,91) = 5.07$, $p < .05$).

Next, liking for the car was entered into a 2 (persuade vs. inform) x 2 (opinion: like vs. dislike) x 2 (ad frame: attributes vs. benefits) between-subjects ANOVA. There was not a significant three-way interaction ($F(1,87) = .25$, NS). To test our hypotheses, we looked at the interaction between communication goal and benefits frame. This interaction was marginally significant ($F(1,87) = 2.77$, $p = .099$). When the advertisement was framed in terms of attributes, there was no difference in how much participants liked the car between communication goal conditions ($M_{Persuade} = 2.90$, $M_{Inform} = 3.31$; ($F(1,44) = .49$, NS). When the advertisement was framed in terms of benefits, there was a marginally significant difference between communication goal conditions ($M_{Persuade} = 3.70$, $M_{Inform} = 2.86$; ($F(1,47) = 2.91$, $p = .094$).

*Target Measures.* Ratings of the movie were analyzed using a 2 (source task: persuade vs. inform) between-subjects ANOVA. Participants rated the film higher when their partner had a goal of being informative (M = 5.61) than when the partner's goal was to persuade (M = 4.71; $F(1,92) = 4.44$, $p < .05$). Participants also felt that the social interaction was more pleasant when the source's goal was to inform (M = 5.85) versus persuade (M = 5.40; $F(1,92) = 4.27$, $p < .05$).

The results of study 4 replicate the bolstering effect shown in study 1a and the benefits framing effect shown in study 3b, and extend these results to an interpersonal context.

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## APPENDIX A

Study 1A: Music Tracks

| Display Order | Song Title | Album | Artist | Genre |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hangover | Hangover | Vato Gonzalez | Dance |
| 2 | Birds on a Wire | Freaks | The Hawk in Paris | Alternative |
| 3 | He Loves to Make Me Cry | Kristen Kelly | Kristen Kelly | Country |
| 4 | Life Underground | Chasing Ghosts | The Amity Affliction | Metal |
| 5 | Spaceship Earth | Love and the Human Outreach | Echo Movement | Reggae |
| 6 | 12 de Maio | Claridão | SILVA | MPB |
| 7 | Messiah (Alvin Risk Remix) | Monsta | Monsta | Electronic |
| 8 | I Want to Feel Good, Pt. 2 | Made Possible | The Bad Plus | Jazz |
| 9 | Elevator (TG Trap Mix) | Lifeology 101: Back to School | Winston Warrior | R&B/Soul |
| 10 | Hear Me (feat. Saigon & Fashawn) | Reporting Live | Journalist 103 | Hip-Hop/Rap |

APPENDIX B

STUDY 2 STIMULI

## Brand H

Brand H is a ten-speed bicycle that is average in price and is manufactured by a reputable firm.

| Above Average | Below Average |
| --- | --- |
| Suspension | Braking power |
| Weight/portability | Seat comfort |

**TABLE 1**

STUDY 3a: MEANS FOR INFERRED ATTRIBUTES

| | Durability | Speed | Overall rating |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dissuade | 4.63 | 5.14 | 4.26 |
| Inform | 6.00 | 6.67 | 5.96 |
| Persuade | 6.53 | 7.16 | 6.47 |